



"When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die."
—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

26-May-23

Pentecost and Memorial Day

Every now and again, the Feast of Pentecost and Memorial Day fall back-to-back on the calendar, as they do this year. At first blush, they seem to hold little in common: One is religious, the other secular; one focuses on the harvest of firstfruits, the other on the patriotic sacrifices of loved ones; one has an agrarian background, the other has its roots in war; and so forth. They seem as far removed from each other as ancient history and current events, as distant as Jerusalem from Washington.

Yet, we should not be too hasty in concluding that they do not share common features. Immediately, we can see that they occur in the same season of the year, as spring is ending and summer looms. In this way, they both mark time, an end and a beginning.

Memorial Day does this in a couple of ways. For most, and especially for children, this holiday, situated at the end of May, represents the end of the school year and the beginning of the more carefree summer months. If the administrators had an ounce of sense, most schools would not run their academic year beyond Memorial Day, since 99 percent of the students have already mentally finished their studies for the year. Requiring them to attend class into the heat of June serves only to fulfill meaningless mandated days-

of-instruction regulations. Of course, it follows that this holiday ushers in summer vacation until Labor Day in early September.

A more serious set of ends and beginnings on Memorial Day is one that those who have lost loved ones in the nation's wars realize all too well. For these, Memorial Day closes one year and begins another without the soldier, sailor, airman, marine, or guardsman or -woman who gave his or her life in the defense of American freedom. For them, this day is not as much a holiday as it is a solemn day of remembrance and pride in the patriotism of their fallen service member. In many, it renews a commitment to the national values that so many have died to protect.

For its part, Pentecost concludes the seven-week count from the Feast of Unleavened Bread, specifically commanded by [God](#) and unlike the determination of any other holy day. Such an oddity is a biblical tip-off that underlying spiritual meaning awaits our further study and consideration. That the count begins in the atmosphere of the [Days of Unleavened Bread](#) - when thoughts of overcoming [sin](#) and putting on righteousness are top of mind - traverses a season of verdure and growth, and finishes in a harvest, a reaping or gathering of ripe produce, should point us toward at least one lesson God wishes us to learn from this annual exercise.

It marks a beginning too. Acts 2 tells us that the Christian church began on the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after [Jesus Christ](#) was resurrected from the dead as a type of the [Wavesheaf offering](#), as the firstfruits ([Romans 8:29](#); [I Corinthians 15:23](#); [Revelation 1:5](#)). On this day, God sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in those few who had been converted during Jesus' ministry, providing them with the understanding, power, and skills to proclaim [the gospel](#) of the Kingdom to [the world](#). From then until now, the church of God has fulfilled this commission to a greater or lesser extent, "the gates of Hades" not prevailing against it ([Matthew 16:18](#)).

Because Pentecost focuses so much on God's church and Christ's work in it, we do not take much of a stretch to consider it a kind of day of remembrance of those who have gone before us spiritually. From that first Christian Day of Pentecost to our own time, thousands of men and women have given themselves in sacrifice - both in dying and in living - to transmit the true gospel to us. Many true [Christians](#) in the first century, and certainly almost

all the apostles, suffered martyrdom for their convictions about God and His way of life. Some of them suffered cruelly in the "pleasure gardens" of Nero and in the "games" in the Coliseum, but many more died alone and unheralded at the hands of rioters, wicked judges, and tyrannical rulers.

The sacrifices did not end there. In many times and places, the [true church](#) and its practices were outlawed under penalty of fines, imprisonment, and death. Under such injustice, keeping the [Sabbath](#) was risking one's life and the lives of one's family members. Whether it was being baptized by immersion, celebrating [Passover](#), or even reading Scripture in one's native tongue, practicing God's way of life was, for them, a matter of life and death. Yet, down through the centuries, many gladly took this risk upon themselves, and what is more, some had the courage to proclaim it beyond their families to the public. Most of these paid the highest price for their boldness, but the truth of God never ceased to be handed down from one generation to the next.

What the author of Hebrews says about the [Old Testament](#) faithful in [Hebrews 11:35-40](#) can be applied to many true Christians over the last nearly two thousand years:

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, [afflicted](#), tormented - of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through [faith](#), did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

The Day of Pentecost pictures the spiritual harvest of firstfruits, among whom will be the Christian faithful through the centuries. They still wait in their graves for their resurrection with us at Christ's return and for the fulfillment of God's promise of eternal life and their reward in His Kingdom (

[I Corinthians 15:51-52](#); [I Thessalonians 4:13-17](#)). Perhaps we can take a few moments this weekend to consider their sacrifices and thank God that He has called such heroes of faith into His Family.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Pentecost and Hope](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

In the account of Simeon in Luke 2:25-30, what did Simeon do to sustain his hope? Simeon's life serves as a precursor to that of God's called-out ones, demonstrating the elements necessary to bring a person to spiritual maturity. The first is hope in God's law. Like Moses, we stand as a kind of mediator, meticulously digesting God's law in order to teach it to the rest of mankind. The second is hope in God's Holy Spirit, which enables us to overcome, produce fruit, and provide witness. The third is hope in God's judgment of the Pentecost offering, representing us, presented to God for inspection, evaluation, and acceptance. The fourth is hope in being God's firstfruits, the wave loaves that are totally consumed by the Priest in His service, giving us hope that we will indeed be in His Kingdom.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Peter's Trumpets Message—on Pentecost](#)

by Charles Whitaker

Peter's first sermon took place on the Day of Pentecost, yet his subject seems to 'fit' the Day of Trumpets. Charles Whitaker explains that the fulfillment of Pentecost begins what will be completed in the fulfillment of Trumpets.

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